

Oral History Newark Library

Interviewee: Frank Hutchins

Interviewer: Robert Curvin

Date: May 5, 2009

Location: Newark Public Library

*Robert Curvin:* Let's kind of talk. Okay. And what I'd like you to do is just begin by telling us a little bit about your history, when you came to Newark, and when you decided to get involved, political activity, and then we'll just move on from there. And Nancy, you should feel free to-

*Frank Hutchins:* Help me.

*Robert Curvin:* That you want to add or-

*Frank Hutchins:* Help me because I'm my memory

*Robert Curvin:* That's okay, we're gonna do fine. So why don't you start by telling me about when, you remember when you came to New York?

*Frank Hutchins:* I'm not certain exactly when, but it was. Oh, I see. That's- how long ago was that?

*Nancy Zak:* Well it was before [unclear] Gibson.

*Frank Hutchins:* Yes, the- before Gibson.

*Nancy Zak:* You were in Milburn before Newark.

*Frank Hutchins:* Yeah, I was in- well I was in, and- Morristown.

*Robert Curvin:* And what were you doing?

*Frank Hutchins:* I was an- I was, what was I doing? I was-

*Robert Curvin:* I can't help you with that one. [laughter]

*Frank Hutchins:* No, I was- I was- I was

*Robert Curvin:* You weren't organizing at that time.

*Frank Hutchins:* No, no, I was working,

*Robert Curvin:* Working, okay. And you remember that you remember coming to Newark, before Gibson? And then you got involved in the in the campaign? Right? What do you remember about the campaign?

*Frank Hutchins:* Well, it was extremely interesting. Because Gibson was, was so inexperienced. And we were, we were all working helping him trying to get that to help him get experience.

*Robert Curvin:* And then when he- after he was elected, you joined the staff for a while?

*Frank Hutchins:* Yeah. First, I joined his campaign. And then a friend of mine was very close. I was working very close with him, John Harvard. And John Harvard said to me, you need to come and work for Gibson. Says you've helped him and- and what have you. And I said, well, I would like it. And so he said, Well, I'm going to submit your name. And he did. And I began to- I've got was it- was hired. And then I started to work for Gibson.

*Robert Curvin:* And what did you do in that first row? What was your job?

*Frank Hutchins:* I was working as a when he- what did he call it now? I was-

*Nancy Zak:* Is Code Enforcement, correct?

*Frank Hutchins:* That was before Code Enforcement. And I was initially working for- working as a- well, I guess I did work Code Enforcement in the beginning.

*Robert Curvin:* And how did that go? Do you think Gibson was accomplishing some things.

*Frank Hutchins:* He was doing very well. He was very sincere. And he we- we were working and I was- what do you call it? A- Well anyhow I was worked as- I can't think of what I was doing. But anyhow.

*Robert Curvin:* Was that when Earl Harris was in?

*Frank Hutchins:* Yeah, that was, yeah, Earl Harris was was- was.

*Robert Curvin:* The council at that time.

*Frank Hutchins:* And that was, well, he wasn't head.

*Robert Curvin:* He wasn't head for first.

*Frank Hutchins:* And then he got the elected head of the Council. And I was working for what- for him.

*Robert Curvin:* Do you remember at all at what point you decided to leave city government as an employee?

*Frank Hutchins:* Oh, wow. That city government, it was really? It was really Oh, it was years-

*Robert Curvin:* [unclear] years, right.

*Frank Hutchins:* Right

*Robert Curvin:* And then when did you sort of get involved with the public housing tenants?

*Frank Hutchins:* Oh, well I started when I was working for the city and as- as time good came out, I was working for the city and working for- for- working as- what do you call it?

*Robert Curvin:* Inspector.

*Frank Hutchins:* As working as an inspector. And then I started to- then I started to- to organize while I was working for the city and through- through all that time, in fact Ken Gibson sort of encouraged it.

*Robert Curvin:* He did?

*Frank Hutchins:* And as time went on, you know, you- after a while, you can't- can't work for both for both places. [chuckle] Yeah.

*Robert Curvin:* So, but why? Why did he encourage it? Did he support the tenants?

*Frank Hutchins:* Yeah, he supported the tenants. And initially he supported the tenants wholeheartedly.

*Robert Curvin:* Because you were really organizing tenants to fight against [unclear]

*Frank Hutchins:* Right. And he- he- it was a pleasure for him for him to have it because, you know, he- at in the beginning, he didn't- he was- he was- the housing authority who was against- working against him. And he was very pleased that that we- that I was working for- but of course as he- after he began to get more control than it wasn't so-

*Robert Curvin:* So comfortable. Then the pressure started coming up to him to get things done.

*Frank Hutchins:* Right.

*Robert Curvin:* You remember some of the people that were around Gibson at that time like Elton Hill.

*Frank Hutchins:* Elton Hill, Elton Hill- and Elton Hill had actually hired me and that's probably the person I can remember the most. There- there were others but I can't- my memory doesn't-

*Robert Curvin:* Right. So, when you left the city though, then you devoted full time organizing tenants.

*Frank Hutchins:* Full time, organizing tenants.

*Robert Curvin:* And at some point, did the city try to stop you?

*Frank Hutchins:* Oh, yeah. They- they didn't they wouldn't pull- you know, they didn't put a lot of pressure. But you would- you would feel it you will know it. And but I didn't stop

*Nancy Zak:* Can you talk about the passage of the first rent control law? Earl Harris, '72?

*Frank Hutchins:* Earl Harris. See initially when we first started, the city was not- didn't, didn't- you didn't- we didn't feel threatened by my- by the work I did. And Earl Harris and was was the- what do you call it?

*Nancy Zak:* Council President.

*Frank Hutchins:* Council president. And when he found out that I was I was organizing tenant, then he, he looked forward to the my helping him. And we work sorta together, which was fine for a while. After a while it wasn't- it wasn't such a pleasure. [chuckle].

*Robert Curvin:* Well he apparently thought you were going to help him to fight Gibson, right?

*Frank Hutchins:* Yeah, yeah. [chuckling]

*Nancy Zak:* And he introduced a bill that you guys wrote.

*Frank Hutchins:* He- well, he introduced the first rent control and, and wheat, I took it and went to town with it and organize around it.

*Robert Curvin:* And you organized [?] people to support the [unclear].

*Frank Hutchins:* Right. And that we wrote the first- we, we actually wrote the first rent control- wrote it, and presented it to him.

*Robert Curvin:* And he introduced it.

*Frank Hutchins:* He introduced it. And it was very well written, even if I do say so. [chuckle]

*Nancy Zak:* Didn't the New Jersey Tenants Organization say it was the best-

*Frank Hutchins:* Best one in the country.

*Robert Curvin:* So what happened after it was introduced? Did it pass?

*Frank Hutchins:* Well, it- it passed initially because first of all, it was- it was the people in the city didn't have any idea that it was the strength that it had. And after- after they began to realize what work and it did surprise the- the landlords and they didn't- they didn't realize it we were- we were writing it after- after it was written and it was submitted. They had a threat passed.

*Robert Curvin:* Then what happened?

*Frank Hutchins:* Then and then then they was they were wise because little by little they- they began to work on it. And- and you know chisel away at and it took him about- it took them about four or five years before they really- they really got, you know- they, they did little by little and they didn't.

*Robert Curvin:* So is there any remainder of this law that's still on the books at this?

*Frank Hutchins:* Oh yeah, no yeah, it was so well written until people all over the country at one time was writing for copies

*Robert Curvin:* What did it do?

*Frank Hutchins:* It it took control of the entire- let's see what am I trying to say? It it was so it was so strong and until they- people all over the country was writing for copies of it and- and it caught the landlord completely- they didn't- they had no idea how strong this bill was.

*Robert Curvin:* So, it set- it set the rules for rent increases and-

*Nancy Zak::* Gave tenants' rights. They provided with basic essential services. Right? [unclear], introduced when they couldn't just throw people out.

*Frank Hutchins:* Right.

*Robert Curvin:* So how did the- the landlords get to chisel- chisel down and who were there who were their friends on the council or in government that supported them?

*Frank Hutchins:* Let me see. I can't- I can't remember exactly their names, but there were a number of number of landlords.

*Nancy Zak:* Wasn't one of them Perilla?

*Frank Hutchins:* He was- he was- he wasn't a lot- he was a landlord. But he worked on the council.

*Nancy Zak:* [unclear]

*Frank Hutchins:* Luis [unclear]. Yes, sir.

*Nancy Zak:* And they gave they gave to the council. Righ?

*Frank Hutchins:* Right. They paid. [chuckle]

*Robert Curvin:* They gave contributions to the council. How many at the at the peak of the organizing effort how many tenants would you say were really part of the movement to improve housing in the city?

*Nancy Zak:* Well, you Frank, you had a VISTA project. Right? In the 70s, right? This was still before my time, but Barnie [?] was telling me last night. Frank, you and you have like 10 VISTAs working for you

*Robert Curvin:* Right, I had-

*Nancy Zak:* Ellsworth Morgan

*Frank Hutchins:* Ellsworth Morgan.

*Robert Curvin:* Ellsworth, oh really, he was a great guy.

*Frank Hutchins:* He was something.

*Nancy Zack:* -supervisor at the time.

*Frank Hutchins:* Right. And he had- he was so dominant. Right when he- we would be in a meeting and suddenly the door would fly open and he'd say who in here with a very strength of his voice would take over the meeting. You really enjoy. He was something else.

*Nancy Zak:* And Frank, Ellsworth [unclear], one of the things you did was the People's Law School?

*Frank Hutchins:* Yes, we, we started the people's Law School here in Newark. Right. at Rutgers law school. We had lawyers from from Rutgers. And the that we taught the tenant, the law.

*Robert Curvin:* Here in Newark.

*Frank Hutchins:* Here in Newark.

*Nancy Zak:* It was at Rutgers Law School.

*Frank Hutchins:* Right. At Rutgers Law School. We had lawyers from- from Rutgers. And the- that we taught the tenants the law.

*Nancy Zak:* And you had a whole book, a curriculum. Which I'm trying to find it.

*Frank Hutchins:* Right. Can't find it?

*Nancy Zak:* No, I'm keeping my eyes open. [chuckle]

*Frank Hutchins:* The years, it's years ago.

*Nancy Zak:* Yeah, this was during the 70s.

*Frank Hutchins:* Right. It was- it was terrific.

*Robert Curvin:* A lot of these things, which were obviously very powerful. Really quite important in Newark's political development. What happened to them? How did they why did they fade away?

*Frank Hutchins:* Well, when we lost funding. The funding was a major thing and funding from the government No, we didn't we never we weren't funded from the government. But we were funded from the different foundations and what have you and you know, after a while they lost interest them and then and-

*Robert Curvin:* Do you think they were reluctant or afraid of the controversy?

*Frank Hutchins:* No, no-

*Nancy Zak:* I was gonna say I think they were afraid of the controversy [unclear].

*Frank Hutchins:* No, I don't- I don't think they were afraid of the controversy. They- they lost interest because they started other things. And- and- and it- after a while, you know, when- when their things are working. They- they decide on other- other things.

*Robert Curvin:* And then they're off to something else.

*Frank Hutchins:* Right. And-

*Robert Curvin:* Some would say there's more glamorous, more interesting at the moment

*Frank Hutchins:* Right.

*Robert Curvin:* It's kind of a fickleness about regulations. Some of them like to jump from one thing right to the next before the job is done.

*Frank Hutchins:* Right.

*Nancy Zak:* Right. You mentioned that you monitored a judge?

*Frank Hutchins:* Oh, forgotten about that

*Nancy Zak:* I was a very striking thing that you did, apparently hasn't been done very often.

*Frank Hutchins:* Right. Well, we had I can't even remember the judges name now.

*Nancy Zak:* Well, Bobbie remembers though, right?

*Robert Curvin:* It was a city judge.

*Frank Hutchins:* No, no, it was- not the city, but county.

*Robert Curvin:* County judge.

*Frank Hutchins:* And I forgot now exactly what it was. But-

*Nancy Zak:* He said he used to talk down to tenants and attorneys.

*Frank Hutchins:* Oh, Lord. He used to- it was terrible. He would talk- he would say to the tenant would be trying to give their case. Even a tenant's attorney would be trying to give the case. And he'd say, oh, I don't think that- that this that. I didn't mean that. Just be so obvious. And- and his prejudice.

*Robert Curvin:* How did you monitor him?

*Frank Hutchins:* Well, we we did we call we had down? I was trying to think of who we reported him to the to the reporting. To the judges.

*Nancy Zak:* She said he was censored by the Supreme Court eventually

*Frank Hutchins:* Yeah.

*Nancy Zak:* Cause I think it's cause you had people sitting in the court room.

*Frank Hutchins:* We sat in his courtroom every day and wrote down his responses to the, to the, to the different cases. And he was- he was so obvious. He and the landlord, would- our landlord would be given something, and he'd be so obvious and is out of the [unclear]. Well, I don't think he meant that. You know, and it was so oh, we would be- we'd come out of the courtroom so upset. Because it was so obvious his, his prejudice. And- and we as we went out, and as soon as it came up, as we kept talking to the to the lawyers, and the lawyer said, Oh, that's ridiculous. He said this, and he said that and we would tell- tell them, and sometimes our indignation would be so and a lot of times to the lawyers for the tenant would be so cowered by what was going on with the judge against him and what have you, and we come out of the court just furious. How dare they say this. And as we went on, we kept going. Annamay Sheppard was one of the major people who, who realized how- how bad things were. Because she wasn't in the court most of the time. But we- when we told her about what was going on and what have you. So she I appeared. And when we- when we went to the- when we were- went before the- the judge that that was determining it. And she came and sat in that in that court room at times. And they weren't. They weren't aware that she was there. And when- when we- we would talk about what was going on and she would tell- tell what was said and how- how this this a judge would talk and how- how a parent he was. And taking the landlord sad.

*Robert Curvin:* Annamay was a professor [unclear] around the clinic. And was a great fighter for tenants'[?] justice.

*Frank Hutchins:* Oh, yeah. She helped us terrifically.

*Nancy Zak:* She helped you start the People's Law School.

*Frank Hutchins:* Yeah. That's right. That's right. She discharged. And he did. So she was she was terrific. She kept us on the- what? What happened? She kept us all on on- on level. Because sometimes, you know, we- we were- we would- tenants and are upset about a number of things. And she would say now, this is not one of the things you can do. This is not one of the things you can say. But this is this definitely is something that you can say. She was terrific.

*Robert Curvin:* She was a real hero.

*Nancy Zak:* Frank, when you were organizing the [unclear], what did you- you went into those buildings from building meetings. Can you describe that a little bit of some of the buildings? Did you go for example to Pavilion or any of those large apartments?

*Frank Hutchins:* Oh, oh, yes. We went into- I can't- I wasn't- I was trying to think of the buildings that we were-

*Nancy Zak:* Garden Spires.

*Frank Hutchins:* Garden Spires

*Nancy Zak:* A lot of the South Ward buildings along Elizabeth Avenue.

*Frank Hutchins:* Yes. Right.

*Robert Curvin:* So, were all those buildings then managed by the Housing Authority? They had taken-

*Frank Hutchins:* No, they weren't. They were they were housing- some of them were Housing Authority buildings. Some of them were- were privately- privately owned buildings. And we spent a whole lot of time working.

*Nancy Zak:* Well in 1987, then you form the HUD Tenants' Coalition.

*Frank Hutchins:* Right. And-

*Nancy Zak:* And that was specifically for the privately owned buildings government assistance properties like Garden Spires, Georgia King Village-

*Robert Curvin:* Brick Towers.

*Frank Hutchins:* Yeah.

*Nancy Zak:* Now where was the building where you got shot at?

*Frank Hutchins:* Oh, I can't remember now. I actually think I couldn't remember.

*Robert Curvin:* Somebody shot at you?

*Frank Hutchins:* Oh yeah. [chuckle] I don't I think it was the landlord's man.

*Robert Curvin:* And you were not injured though.

*Frank Hutchins:* No. [chuckle] Thank, the Lord. But that was only the Lord that kept me from-

*Robert Curvin:* They never found out who it was.

*Frank Hutchins:* No. Well, it wasn't. They didn't find out because the guy got out of the way right away. And I couldn't get the police in time enough to- but- [chuckle]

*Robert Curvin:* Things can get [unclear] pretty dangerous.

*Frank Hutchins:* Oh, it was in the beginning. And the beginning there it was really extremely dangerous, because the landlords was determined then, that you're not coming into my building and telling me what to do about my building and I was young. And took was- was took just walked in there and said, We're

here. And we have a right to be here. And we're not leaving. We don't care what you say.

*Robert Curvin:* You get tenants to the [unclear] with you.

*Frank Hutchins:* I'd hold that- I have the tenant in there. And what would happen is the landlord would come into the meeting. And once I got my meeting started the tenants- the tenants would say to them, you're not supposed to be here. And they would- some of them would- would really take- some the landlords would really take. This is not building- this is a [chuckle] man tenants would- tenants would really let them have it.

*Nancy Zak:* They didn't even want you to pass out flyers about the meeting. Sometimes you have problems.

*Frank Hutchins:* Right. Oh, yeah. It was a struggle in the beginning there.

*Robert Curvin:* Now explain something for me. All this was going on, after we, you and a lot of other people had elected a black mayor. And wouldn't you expect that in a city with a black mayor that there would be more support this kind of organizing?

*Frank Hutchins:* No.

*Robert Curvin:* No, why not?

*Frank Hutchins:* You would expect that that would happen. But the- but the mayor would take attitude. You- this is your- this is your battle. And we're not gonna do anything about it. As our remember, I remember-

*Robert Curvin:* This is true of Gibson and Sharpe James?

*Frank Hutchins:* Yeah. I remember when- and Sharpe James was a little bit better then- then- then Gibson. Because Gibson would they- they would- he would- he would have me come into his office. And tell him about what I- what had happened. And he'd sit there and laugh. Yeah. You know, I tell him how I stood up to this [unclear]. And he would laugh. But they were not. It was like they were really afraid to take take a stand. And at and at that time, I was really young. And I have a lot of what do you say? Nerve? Yeah.

*Robert Curvin:* Well, how do we get young people today to stand up and fight for improvements for people, particularly for people?

*Frank Hutchins:* It takes- it takes- it takes somebody- it takes- you'd have to have a person who has the ability to stand and not be afraid. You know, we did- we did some things that were really frightening now [chuckle]. But there are some things that are still happening, but not enough.

*Robert Curvin:* Not enough people that are taking up the struggle.

*Frank Hutchins:* Right.

*Robert Curvin:* What would you say to young- suppose a group of young people came into the room. And while you were thinking about all these things that happened, what would you say to them?

*Frank Hutchins:* I would tell them that you have a right. There's a- you don't have to take- be afraid to speak up. And you don't and don't let anybody bully you and stand up and speak your mind.

*Robert Curvin:* What's, what's the reward that you feel from the work that you did?

*Frank Hutchins:* It's control. The fact that you can- that- that you have a right. One of the things that that we always taught people was, do not be afraid of the landlord. When you're right, you're right. Now make sure that you are right. But don't let nobody frighten you. When- when- when you- when you are right.

*Nancy Zak:* And Frank, in- now you- I got involved in 1982 with you. And this goes to what you said about when they were chipping away the law, so we formed the coalition to say rent control. And Frank we had a lot of help and support from churches that-

*Frank Hutchins:* Yes indeed we certainly did.

*Nancy Zak:* One of the differences between now and then, say, is that there was the Metropolitan Ecumenical Ministry.

*Frank Hutchins:* They were terrific.

*Nancy Zak:* And they played a big role.

*Robert Curvin:* Frank Gibson who was one of the early organizers of men[?]. And they also helped during the campaign in 1970.

*Frank Hutchins:* They- they were terrific.

*Robert Curvin:* What about the black churches in Newark?

*Frank Hutchins:* Not- They were timid. They were exceptionally timid.

*Robert Curvin:* Why is that do you think?

*Frank Hutchins:* Because the number of- they thought a number of the landlords and what have you, were, were members of the churches and- and they weren't- they weren't- weren't- that was unusual together. Black church to speak. There were there were occasionally you get- get one or two that would- would speak up and- and join us. But it wasn't many.

*Robert Curvin:* I always thought that the churches were also concerned about many of them getting more land. Getting more programs in their church from the government. So they were in a sense neutralized

*Frank Hutchins:* And their members- members were somewhat- Oh, no. We not- we not- we don't want to get involved in that. We don't want to- we don't know. Don't want to, you know, stand up there. There were a few- few ministers that- that spoke up, but it was not- it wasn't not that many.

*Robert Curvin:* Do you have anything else, Nancy, cause I'm gonna stop there I seem to be doing pretty damn well. [chuckle] Yeah. And I think we've got- we've got a good sense of the story here today. I really appreciate that so much. This is absolutely wonderful to be able to save this, preserve this for- for the future.

*Frank Hutchins:* I'm thankful that that it can be preserved because we did fight so hard. And was against odds.

*Nancy Zak:* David and Goliath

*Frank Hutchins:* Without people like Nancy and- and- I. Oh, what- what-

*Nancy Zak:* And your first crew, you had Woody and Bonnie and all the VISTAS that came in the 70s, [unclear]

*Frank Hutchins:* Right.

*Nancy Zak:* Many women.

*Frank Hutchins:* Right, I always-

*Robert Curvin:* You know, let me ask another question before we- [unclear] Okay, Okay, I did an interview with somebody I won't mention. But he made the comment that is in many ways black leadership in Newark has failed. What would you say to that?

*Frank Hutchins:* It's not the same. It's not the same. What happened- what happened has happened is not- there's not- you always have to have one person who stand out and takes take the lead and is not afraid when- when things start to fall apart. When they- when- when people start to- to threaten you and what have you, it takes you- it takes somebody who stand up and say, and what happens if they get- you get one leader who's- who's willing to stand and fight, then then pretty much a number of people will follow them.

*Robert Curvin:* But specifically, though, what about Gibson and Sharpe James? Who were our two previously elected [unclear] is it accurate to say that they failed?

*Frank Hutchins:* They did that- they didn't- they didn't see that the job is that they, they they felt that they that that was the city getting money doing other things. They didn't see- they- they felt that people will- will come and stand up and fight.

And a number a number of people came and pretended to fight, but people who had- who had the nerve to stand up and- and really fight were very few.

*Robert Curvin:* Is that because most of them went into the government?

*Frank Hutchins:* Yes. Oh, yeah. And they were bought off easy. For- for peanuts. Popcorn. [laughter] We would- we would, Nancy knows, we would be thinking that somebody was on our side. And we look and they'd be- they'd go- it'd be just the opposite.

*Nancy Zak:* Cause they didn't care about the housing condition.

*Frank Hutchins:* No, no there- there- everybody was concerned with, what can I get out of this?

*Robert Curvin:* Do you think this is characteristic of Newark? Or is it just a human weakness?

*Frank Hutchins:* It's a human weakness. And the number of- the number of- I've traveled through the country and a number of people- there's always only a few who can who will stand up and say the hell with this I'm not gonna take it and- and other people who join them, and the next thing you know, they're on the other side.

*Robert Curvin:* I want to get a couple still photos of you before I leave. So that's what I'm gonna do now.

*Frank Hutchins:* We've had some fine people.

*Nancy Zak:* Like Arlene Henry, remember?

*Frank Hutchins:* Oh, yeah. She was a babbler.

*Nancy Zak:* And they would get there-

*Robert Curvin:* Are they still around?

*Frank Hutchins:* I mean, Henry is, I suppose she's, I don't think she's up to fighting like she used to. And, and what happens is, after a while, people get tired and worn out. And they don't think that they are winning. And you look for them and they say, I can't continue to do that.

*Nancy Zak:* And then you find new ones [unclear], like Miss Davis is-

*Frank Hutchins:* Oh, Miss Davis is terrific. I tell you, I- I can't think of- I was trying to think of the the- the lady her mom. I can't even remember her name. And she's still struggling. Her and her mother.

*Nancy Zak:* You're talking about Debbie. Debbie Dean and Debbie Montgomery [unclear]

*Frank Hutchins:* Right. They are they are terrific.

*Nancy Zak:* I think you had like as many as sixty buildings, right?

*Frank Hutchins:* Oh yeah.

*Robert Curvin:* Sixty, wow

*Nancy Zak:* At a time, and at the height of everything. We had buildings in Camden, Trenton, and Atlantic City.

*Frank Hutchins:* Right, Atlantic City. Atlantic City, I think is still going.

*Nancy Zak:* They're all- well Camden is still going, so-

*Frank Hutchins:* They feel- once people feel that they got a chance to stand up. And they just continue to go-

*Nancy Zak:* [unclear]

*Robert Curvin:* [unclear]

*Frank Hutchins:* Come on over here. [laughter]

*Nancy Zak:* Remember that one time we were at the Council so late, and they kept us till like twelve midnight, you were so upset. I remember Donald Payne was on the Council

*Frank Hutchins:* Right. Oh, he was something else. Yeah, he- we were- I was so disappointed in him. I didn't know what on earth to do. And I did my mind telling him too

*Robert Curvin:* Really, you know, Donald- Donald and I lived in the same neighborhood, in Silverlake when we were like this, right? I've known him all my life. In fact, the- the day that I met my wife, I was home from the service. Bill Payne invited me to go swimming with him and his wife to be and my wife. So, I get, I go swimming. And then I said to Pat, well, what are you doing tonight? She says I'm going out with Donald. So, I said, Well, I'm going to him tomorrow. So, I think you'd have to break it. [laughter] The rest is history. She did break the date with him. But then about 25 years later, she said, you know, I never told you though the night the next night, I went out with Donald. She thought she was pretty safe at that point.

*Nancy Zak:* One thing that's important is when Donald, Tucker and you- remember Donald and you were part of the MTL together in the beginning. But then there was a split. The public housing tenants split off from the privately owned, right. So, Donald took the public tenants. And you kept all the privately owned buildings and government assisted property. And they then grew up as two separate arms. And he was supposed to be the [unclear] and- and you were off with all the privately owned everything. And there were thousands and thousands of families who owe the fact that they had a roof

over their head. And the conditions were better than they would've been. But that was a historic split. And part of the reason the public housing tenants are the way they are, didn't he work out sort of a deal where they got funded. The Tenants' Organization in each of the public housings would get money from the housing authority. So-

*Robert Curvin:* They got coopted.

*Nancy Zak:* And they eventually became like union shops.

*Robert Curvin:* Yeah, I mean, there's so many the Housing Authority, historically, like even when during the days of Addonizio, was the instrument for cooptation. The city couldn't do it. The Housing Authority had because they had all this federal money. They had all these jobs where they would redefine the job descriptions and so on, and they'd find anybody you know anybody that raised your voice to get a job at the Housing Authority.

*Nancy Zak:* But if you got outside of it like when you started the Newark- when Donald and you, the Newark came back together for the Newark Low Income Housing Coalition, Harris David and you started you started fighting for that one for one replacement. And then you had residents who were outside went outside their own tenant organizations to fight, became part of this one for one replacement. That case went on until almost until last year. so he and Connie Pascal, you know, Connie's his name. It's like a woman's name, but it's-

*Robert Curvin:* But I mean, Harris, I knew Harris extremely well. He was even very active in the anti-poverty program. Just a very, you know, straightforward, simple, committed guy who never gave up they never gave up.

*Nancy Zak:* There's still people. There's still- I mean, even though it's not at the level that it was when Frank when we had the resources. Right?

*Frank Hutchins:* Right. There's still people-

*Nancy Zak:* Who are working this, fighting this-

*Frank Hutchins:* Battle.

*Robert Curvin:* The battle will continue.

[All unclear]

*Robert Curvin:* You mentioned John Harvard. I haven't heard anybody mentioned John Harvard's name and so long. I mean, I don't know if I would have ever even thought of John Harvard. But John was was one of the early members of Newark Chapter here in Newark. And I always remember him being so- he was always well dressed. And always well spoken and always so precise about everything. He was quite a character.

*Nancy Zak:* Yeah, I remember him.

*Frank Hutchins:* He was something I'll never forget. We were- I forgot where it was from somebody was- he started saying if you- he says if you were a person who was saying such and such a thing he said that it wasn't true and if so can he had an- I don't know he had this built but when he got through it he said a you a damn liar. [laughter] I'll never forget it.

*Robert Curvin:* You also mentioned another name. That brought back a memory, Melo Barca [?]

*Frank Hutchins:* I think he's still around.

*Robert Curvin:* Is he still around?

*Nancy Zak:* I don't know, Bonnie mentioned him.

*Robert Curvin:* When I was a caseworker, in the early 60s, Welfare Board, occasionally the tenants would not pay their rent. And so, we were responsible for collecting, collecting the rent for the tenant, and then passing it on to the landlord so the tenant wouldn't get evicted. And so, I had this tenant who was living in a building that Melo Barca owned, and I remember him calling me on the phone and saying that I understand that you are going to gather the tenant that the tenants rent from her check, and you know, how can I get it? So, we started to I said, well, you know, let's- we'll figure that out. That's not important. And then the next thing he says, he said, you know, these niggers are just absolutely [unclear, laughter] outrageous. I said what. He said, Yeah, he said, you know, these niggers throw out their garbage. The fact one of the things you know, so I said, you know, Mr. Mel rock, I know just exactly how you should get your money. Why don't you come up here to the Welfare Board and collect it? Come to Astra may come to my desk to get it. So, he's all been there this afternoon. So that afternoon, this guy comes up. And my desk is right by the door. He walks in, he looks around, he walked right by my desk for the supervisor's office who was white, right? And she says, he says, Where's, where's Mr. Kerman? And she says, well, he is right there. You walk right by him. And he turned around and he turns around and I'm watching this, and he goes like this [laughter]. He sits down and he says, You Mr. Curvin? Yes, I am. I'm Mr. Melo Barca guy. I said I know, gave him the money. I didn't say anything. Pretty clear in the lesson. My supervisor Jane Wieman and she comes out- she said what was going on? It was what he was about is he Japanese? [laughter]

*Frank Hutchins:* He was a trip- a trip. Boy, you know who used to get him? Love, we just got through talking about- John, John Harvard. Yeah. He- we were having this meeting while we were talking. And anyhow, he's he was a meeting and

something about he couldn't get his money into something else. And John had talked to him about it. And so, he's, he was saying something. He said, John said, you and I were talking. He said, and I told you such and such a thing. And if you say that I just didn't say I say you [laughter]

*Robert Curvin:* Well Frank

*[End of Audio]*